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MEDIA RELEASE

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## Iron overload amplifies other chronic health conditions

New studies reveal Australia's most common genetic disorder causes far higher levels of serious disease than previously thought and have prompted calls for greater use of simple detection and treatment techniques.

Findings from research led by the University of Exeter published in the British Medical Journal last week showed the iron-overload condition haemochromatosis quadrupled risk of liver disease, doubled risk of arthritis and caused higher risk of diabetes and chronic pain.

Haemochromatosis Australia welcomes the new findings which confirm recent Australian studies and highlight the importance of early diagnosis as well as monitoring and treatment of the condition to avoid harm and additional health complications.

President Dr Dianne Prince said the new research using UK Biobank data provides the most robust estimates to date of the prevalence of haemochromatosis-associated disease. Previous research has found the occurrence of haemochromatosis in Australia to be similar to that in the UK.

'This research supports the case for a national screening program to identify those at risk of developing iron overload and associated preventable chronic conditions here in Australia.

'Awareness of haemochromatosis is more important now than ever as early diagnosis will help save lives, cut health costs and reduce unnecessary suffering for so many individuals and families.

'Haemochromatosis is the most common genetic disorder in Australia yet it is under-diagnosed, partly because its symptoms – including fatigue, depression and joint pain – are confused with a range of other illnesses. These findings show it also has a multiplier impact on other chronic diseases,' said Dr Prince.

'It is a serious condition if undiagnosed or untreated. However genetic detection and testing of iron levels is simple and affordable, and the condition itself is easily treated by removing blood.

'The tragedy is that many people suffer harm, disease and disability unnecessarily when we know early diagnosis and timely management of their condition by donating blood is simple, safe and effective.'

Dr Prince said these new findings are timely because Haemochromatosis Australia will shortly begin a young adult awareness campaign to encourage early diagnosis of genetic susceptibility and treatment before health complications arise.

Recent Australian research has shown that haemochromatosis should be treated even when iron stores are mildly elevated.

People with haemochromatosis absorb too much iron from their diet which accumulates over time and causes damage to body organs if not removed (usually by regular blood donations).

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For information about Haemochromatosis Australia visit [www.ha.org.au](http://www.ha.org.au)

Details about the Exeter research is here: [https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title\\_700061\\_en.html](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_700061_en.html)